

SOUTHERN BLIGHT OF SCHEFFLERA

S. A. Alfieri, Jr. and J. F. Knauss¹

Schefflera, *Brassaia actinophylla* F. Muell., commonly known as the 'queen's umbrella tree' is a subtropical species grown both outdoors as a tree and as a commercial foliage plant. It is native to Australia (2) and common in many areas of the tropics, as well as in subtropical areas such as South Florida where it is observed at heights up to 25 ft (3).

The cause of southern blight is *Sclerotium rolfsii* Sacc., a fungus known to attack a wide variety of plants (1) especially during the early stages of plant growth and propagation. The fungus is characterized by its coarse web of mycelium which is interspersed with small, spherical sclerotia resembling mustard seed and tending to serve as the overwintering stage in aiding the survival of this fungus under adverse conditions.

SYMPTOMS The first visible symptoms of infection occur in 12 days following exposure of *Schefflera* plants to the fungus. These are characterized as a light brown, water-soaked necrosis on the stems at the soil line. The lesions completely encircle the stem and are delimited from healthy stem tissues by a thin, dark brown border (Fig. 1A). The necrotic portions of the stem are soon colonized by a coarse white web of fungus mycelium which is interspersed with small, spherical, tan to brown sclerotia (Fig. 1B).



Fig. 1. Southern blight of *Schefflera*: A.) basal stem infection at the soil line; B) enlargement of (A) showing brown necrotic basal stems colonized by coarse, white mycelium and young sclerotia of *Sclerotium rolfsii*.

¹Assistant Plant Pathologist, University of Florida. Ridge Ornamental Horticultural Laboratory, Apopka, Fla.

Foliage wilt develops in 4 weeks, often followed by complete collapse of the plant at the soil line.

CONTROL. Sanitation is without doubt the most practical means of control. Infected plants and old plant debris should be effectively removed from areas of plant propagation and seedling growth. The use of 'clean' or treated soil is of utmost importance. As a chemical control Terraclor (75 WP, 1% lb/100 gal water) as a post emergence soil drench provided effective disease control. Moreover, phyto-toxicity of this material was negligible.

Literature Cited

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